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## SERMON DLII.

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### THE DUTY OF CHRISTIANS IN REFERENCE TO LEGAL PROSECUTIONS.

"But brother goeth to law with brother, and that before unbelievers. Now therefore there is utterly a fault among you, because ye go to law one with another. Why do ye not rather take wrong? Why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded?"—1 Cor. 6: 6, 7.

It is the duty of Christians to "submit themselves to every ordinance of man, for the Lord's sake." God has appointed magistrates to rule over us in righteousness. It is his design that they should preserve the peace and order of civil society, protect the innocent, justify the righteous, and restrain evil-doers; and it is the duty of Christians to yield a ready and cheerful submission to the civil authority for these purposes. When we enter the Church of Jesus Christ, and place ourselves under the government of a spiritual kingdom, we do not cast off the obligations of obedience to the civil law. Christians should always evince a high respect for the government; they should set an example of obedience to the law of the land. There is no Christian principle or doctrine that interferes with the just claims of civil government, or that exonerates us, in any sense or in any degree, from the duty we owe to the civil magistrate.

But this is no reason why we should forsake the principles of religion, and resort to the law, in cases of difference between us and our Christian brethren, which should be settled in a religious manner. The Church is an institution founded on the highest

principles of justice and benevolence, in which all differences are to be settled according to those principles, as they are revealed in the gospel, and exemplified in the character of Christ and his true disciples. And no disciple of Christ can, consistently with his Christian duty, go to law with his brother, before the civil magistrate, when the church is fully competent to decide the matter—when it is a case belonging to the church, and cannot be properly judged by the magistrate, who may be an unbeliever, an unjust person, and give a wrong decision.

The apostle refers to this subject in the text, and the passages connected with it; and the instructions which he delivers are so important, and have such a direct bearing on the conduct of professing Christians in our day, that they deserve our solemn consideration: "Brother goeth to law with brother, and that before unbelievers. Now therefore there is utterly a fault among you, because ye go to law with one another. Why do ye not rather take wrong? Why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded?"

In the further examination of this subject, we propose to consider *the duty of Christians in reference to legal prosecutions*. We shall endeavor to show,

1. *That Christ has made it the duty of his disciples to settle all their differences among themselves, without resorting to legal prosecutions*; and, 2. *Exhibit some reasons why Christians should not go to law with each other.*

The words of the text are addressed to Christians. Paul reproves them for what he considers a great evil in the Church. "Brother goeth to law with brother, and that before unbelievers." He represents this as a great fault, committed openly, and in violation of every principle by which Christians should be governed in their conduct towards each other. He speaks of it as an evil which admitted of no justification under any circumstances, and deserved the censure and execration of all who felt for the honor of Christ and the interests of the Church. He raises his voice, and bears testimony against this sin, because he regarded it as a deep stain on the Christian character. It had brought a reproach on religion, and a scandal into the Church, and could not be tolerated without endangering the very existence of the Church, and subverting those elementary principles by which alone it could be preserved. This was the view which the apostle took of the sin, and therefore he denounces it in the strongest and most emphatic language: "*Dare* any of you, having a matter against another, go to law? I speak to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you—not one that shall be able to judge between his brethren? But brother goeth to law with brother, and that before unbelievers. There is utterly a fault among you; ye do wrong." This is the language of the apostle;

language which expresses in the strongest terms his abhorrence of the conduct of those members of the Church who prosecuted their brethren before the civil magistrate, and brought this reproach upon the Christian religion.

The Church of Christ is designed to be an association of kindred spirits, where all variance, and strife, and dissensions, and bitterness, and wrath are to be excluded; where all are to be united in sentiment and feeling, and regard and treat each other as brethren. And where there is such a spirit, such a union of hearts, there will be no *disposition* to create disputes and stir up contentions. But it is to be lamented that the Church, which should always exhibit her principles in the conduct of her members, is not exempt from these evils. Christ says, "It must needs be that offenses come." He knew that none of his disciples were entirely free from the remnants of sin in their hearts, and that grievances would arise in his Church. He therefore warns us against these offenses, that when they do come, we may meet them in the right spirit, and avert the disasters with which they threaten us. We are to avoid all such offenses, as tending to disunion and strife among Christian brethren. We are to guard against them, as far as may be in our power. But when they come, we are to treat them as unavoidable and almost necessary evils, connected with the imperfection and corruption of our nature, and endeavor to remove them in the most speedy and effectual manner.

How is this to be done? How are the differences between Christian brethren to be treated? How are they to be settled, so as to prevent the unhappy and fatal consequences which so often result from them? We answer, by *Christian arbitration*. If the matter in dispute cannot be settled among the parties themselves, they should be referred to the judgment and decision of brethren in the church. This is the law of Christ. He directs: "If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him of his fault between him and thee alone. If he shall hear thee, then thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it to the church." This is the rule of Christ, which his disciples are to follow in all cases of difference between them. They are first to try to settle their grievances among themselves, and if they cannot succeed in this way, which is of all others the best and most effectual, they are to make their appeal to the *church*, and no other tribunal. Christ speaks of no other appeal. In all this direction, which is so very minute, and was doubtless designed to cover all cases of difficulty between his disciples, Christ says not a word that can justify an appeal to the civil magistrate. He gives not the least intimation that

Christians should ever resort to the law, in cases of difference with their brethren. On the contrary, he expressly prohibits such an appeal, and directs that such cases should be settled in the church, according to the principles and spirit of the gospel. The church is to hear, consider, and decide; and in no case is the matter to be taken out of the hands of the church and carried before the civil magistrate, to the dishonor of religion, and the disgrace and injury of the parties concerned.

The same direction is given by the inspired apostle in connection with the text. He teaches, that it is the duty of Christians to abstain from all legal prosecutions, and refer their differences to the *arbitration of their Christian brethren*. And he does so, upon the ground that Christians are *best qualified* to judge between their brethren, and settle their controversies. They are the proper and competent judges in all such cases; for, says the apostle, "do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world?" They are to sit with Christ on his throne, and by their principles and testimony, the decision in the great day of final account, when all the world shall be judged before God, is to be made. And if they are competent to determine matters of the highest importance, in a spiritual sense,—if they have that wisdom which is from above, and surpasses all other wisdom,—shall they not be considered competent to determine those small secular matters which divide the hearts of Christian brethren, and set them at variance? When God has in a certain sense committed to them the judgment of the angels,—when he has enabled them by a spiritual and divine influence to determine the state and condition of an order of beings so far above them,—will he not also enable them to form a correct judgment of their equals, and decide matters which concern them? And in view of all this, the high and holy character which Christians should always sustain, and the exalted destiny which awaits them, he asks, "Is there not a wise man among you, that shall be able to judge between his brethren?" And to take away all pretense for refusing the judgment of their brethren, for the want of wisdom which some might allege, the apostle asserts that those even who are least esteemed in the church are capable of judging, and ought to be considered competent to decide such matters; and that in rejecting the judgment of the humblest individual among them, if he was a true Christian, they did wrong, and subjected religion to the contempt of its enemies.

This is the doctrine of the apostle,—a doctrine which he taught for all the churches. He inculcates a principle essentially connected with the interests of religion, and the usefulness and prosperity of every church. He shows that Christians are bound by their religious obligations to submit all matters of difference, which cannot be arranged among themselves, to the arbitration

of their brethren in the church ; and that when they go to law with one another, they dishonor themselves and inflict a deep wound on religion ; that such a proceeding on the part of a Christian, by whatever reasons he may seek to justify himself, is wrong, and cannot be reconciled with the spirit and principles by which he professes to be governed. This is what the apostle teaches. And here we might stop, and say it is sufficient for us to know the will of God on this subject, as revealed to us in the Scriptures ; for when we know the will of God, we are to abide by it, without any further reason or argument. It is enough for us to know, that when a professing Christian goes to law with his brother, he goes contrary to the will of God clearly expressed in his Word. He breaks his covenant vows, and violates his sacred engagements and duties as a member of the Church of Christ. But we will go a step further, and show that there are strong and weighty reason—reasons which we consider binding on the conscience of every Christian—why he should not go to law with his brother.

1. *It is contrary to the spirit and precepts of the gospel.* The instructions of Christ and the apostle, as we have already stated, must be regarded as conclusive on this subject. They forbid Christians to resort to civil prosecutions against each other ; and had Christ and his apostles left no other command on record, the authority to which we have referred would be sufficient to show that such a proceeding is contrary to the precepts of the gospel. But there are other commands and precepts, equally binding and conclusive. Christ enjoins it on his disciples, as a universal and fundamental law of his kingdom, that they should *love one another*. “A new commandment I give you, that ye love one another, as I have loved you.” He called this precept the new commandment, because it is the great and distinguishing precept of the gospel, which Christians must observe as a mark of their profession. And he adds, “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another.” This love, which Christians are to bear to each other, is the test of their Christian character, and this test must be exhibited by every individual, and in every church, professing Christ and his religion. Where this love is wanting, the evidence, the power, the life of religion is wanting. Hence the importance of this precept, and the indispensable necessity of Christians conforming to it, that they may show themselves approved unto God, and exhibit before the world an evidence that they are brethren, united by the sacred bonds of a spiritual and holy fellowship. The apostle says, “Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice ; and be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake has forgiven you.” (Eph. 4 : 31, 32.)

"I beseech you, brethren, that there be no divisions among you, but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment." (1. Cor. 1: 10.) "Brethren, be of one mind, live in peace, and the God of love and peace shall be with you." (2. Cor. 13: 11.) Such are the precepts of the gospel, and the spirit of the gospel corresponds with these precepts. It is a gospel of peace, it breathes a spirit of peace, and inculcates this blessed and heavenly spirit on the mind of every Christian. And no man can be a Christian, unless he is a man of peace, and cherishes this holy and heavenly principle in his heart. When a man cherishes this principle, when he is actuated by a spirit of love towards his Christian brother, he will feel no disposition to appear against him in a court of law, to injure him, either in his character or his property.

This brings to my recollection an instance of two neighbors settling a difficulty in a truly religious manner. While one was absent from home, the other burned a piece of land which he was clearing. The fire passed into his neighbor's woods, and notwithstanding all his efforts to arrest its progress, it destroyed a valuable portion of the woods. Upon the arrival of the injured neighbor at home, the other went to him, and said, "Neighbor, the fire from my field entered your woods. I did all I could to prevent it, but could not stop it until it had destroyed much of your valuable timber, and I have come to propose to you, that we choose two men to go and examine the injury, and whatever they say, I will pay you, without any further trouble or expense." "Well," said the other, "I do not know that we can choose any two better men than ourselves to settle this matter." "Very well," said the first, "make your proposition; I will see whether I can agree to it." "Neighbor," said the injured party, "the damage I have sustained was not owing to your neglect. It is a misfortune, which in the providence of God has befallen me; you could not help it. I should consider it wrong to take a cent from you. Let us say no more about it, and be friends, as we have always been." Here we see the spirit of true Christians manifested. What a lovely, forgiving, noble, disinterested spirit! And how different is this from that spirit which is always ready to go to law; that selfish, worldly and revengeful spirit, which seeks only to gratify itself, and injure others.

2. *It brings strife and contention into the Church.* The union and harmony of the Church is a very important matter, a matter that should be well considered by its members. It is to be lamented that by many it is so little considered, and that for trifling causes this harmony is permitted to be disturbed, and discord and contention introduced among the members of Christ's body, which ought to be one heart and one soul. God looks upon the peace and harmony of his Church as a matter of so much importance,



that he has denounced his severest judgments against those who shall be guilty of disturbing it. Christ has said, "Wo to that man through whom the offense cometh. It would have been better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea," than that he should be the means of bringing such an offense into the Church. It is the will and design of God that Christians should dwell together in "the unity of the Spirit, and the bonds of peace." This is one of the great purposes for which he has instituted his Church on the earth. And God sets such a high value on the peace and unity of the Church, that he has directed his servants to "mark them which cause divisions, and avoid them." The apostle also charges the members of the Church, that "there be no divisions among them," and that they should avoid every thing that would lead to contention and strife; and that if there were any among them that were disposed to create divisions, they should not be tolerated. And there is nothing which causes so much variance among Christians, and so much bitter feeling in a church, as legal prosecutions. They destroy the friendship of families, and the kind feelings between neighbors, who have lived in peace and harmony for years; they cause breaches which are never healed in this world. There is nothing which so soon breaks up the fellowship of churches, and alienates the hearts of Christians from each other, so that they cannot be reconciled. These are the sad effects of the spirit of litigation, when it enters the church. It sets brother against brother, family against family, and is such a contagious poison, that it soon spreads over the whole church with its corrupting and deadening influence.

3. *It dishonors Christ and religion.* The honor of Christ is closely connected with the conduct of every professing Christian. If he lives up to his profession, and leads a holy life, Christ is honored. He is honored by the consistent conduct of his disciple, by his efforts to do good, by the blessed influence he exerts, and the precious example he exhibits before the world. But, if he is not consistent in his conduct, if he disregards the obligations of religion, and sets a bad example, and exerts an evil influence, Christ is dishonored, the cause of religion injured, and the prejudices of the world against it increased and strengthened. This is the invariable effect of the unworthy conduct of professing Christians. It dishonors Christ, opens the mouths of gain-sayers, casts stumbling-blocks in the way of sinners, and prevents them from embracing a religion which has been thus dishonored and abused.

This is so in all cases where Christians dishonor their profession, but more especially when they bring their disputes before the world, into courts of law, and show their unchristian temper in public trials, where, of all places, it should be least exhibited.

For we have sufficient evil in our hearts, and men see enough of it in our daily walk, without making a public exhibition of ourselves in a court of justice. When we enter there, we lay aside our religious character; renounce our principles of love and communion, and fellowship with our brethren. We declare before the world that we have no confidence in those principles. We come down from the high and holy ground which we have assumed, and put ourselves on a level with the open enemies of religion, who have always treated our principles and profession with contempt. And need we wonder, when professing Christians place themselves in such a position, that the enemies of religion should rejoice; that they should feel themselves encouraged, and consider it a great triumph? Is it not astonishing that men who have any respect for themselves, or regard for religion, should be willing to sacrifice their own honor, and the honor of religion, for the sake of gratifying a little selfish feeling, or gaining some trifling worldly advantage?

4. *It tends to the destruction of souls.* It is very unfortunate for many professors of religion, that they are so much governed by what they conceive to be their worldly interests, and lose sight of their spiritual interests. They are often prompted by their worldly feelings to do what their religious interests, if they were properly understood and regarded, would forbid them to do. They suffer themselves to be carried away by their worldly propensities, without considering the injury they are doing to their own souls and the souls of others. Thus they are tempted to go to law, because they consider it their interest. And if you endeavor to convince them that it is their Christian duty to keep out of the law, and rather suffer wrong than injure their souls and bring reproach on the Christian profession, they are ready to say, "I have been injured; I have been deprived of my rights, and I cannot let this matter rest; I must have satisfaction and appeal to the law, for the law only gives me redress. If I do not resort to the law, I must be deprived of my rights, and suffer myself to be injured and defrauded." What then? Suppose you are injured. Is it not better to be injured in your property than in your soul? Would it not be much better for you to lose a little property than to lose your soul? Has Christ not taught you that it is better to *suffer* wrong than *do* wrong? Has he not told you that you ought rather to take wrong and suffer yourself to be defrauded than to go to law with your brother? Has he not made it your Christian duty to make a sacrifice of your worldly interests for the sake of promoting the interests of religion? And will you refuse to make this sacrifice; or rather, will you sacrifice the interests of religion for the sake of your worldly interests? Do you really think that it is your interest ever to violate the obligations of religion? If you do, you are



laboring under a great mistake. Your interest as a Christian is to act like a Christian, live like a Christian, and avoid every temptation to sin, and every appearance of evil, and engage in nothing that may prove a snare to your own soul or the souls of your brethren. When, as a Christian, you are called to suffer wrong, it is your interest to do so; to bear the cross and despise the shame; to endure the mortification, and not think strange of it. Did not Christ suffer wrong? And should not you be willing to suffer it for the sake of following his example? Do you think it would injure you to follow the example of Christ? No Christian was ever injured by suffering wrong, forgiving injuries, or doing good when he was tempted to do evil. But, oh! how many have been injured by yielding to temptations to do wrong; by indulging in unforgiving dispositions, gratifying revengeful feelings, and following what they considered their worldly interests! How many souls have been destroyed in this way, and what multitudes are still led away by this delusion which Satan has so long practised on the minds of men!

From the views and arguments that have been presented, it must appear evident,

1. *That it is manifestly wrong for professors of religion to go to law against each other, and that it is an evil which should be discountenanced by every Christian.* If Christians are to love and treat each other as brethren; if they are not to offend, not to injure each other; and if by their conduct towards one another before the world they are to evince their mutual love and regard; then, surely, it is wrong ever to place themselves in a situation in which they must appear as enemies, who are endeavoring to injure and persecute each other. When professors of religion place themselves in such an attitude, they contradict all their professions of love and attachment for one another. They set at naught all the counsels and admonitions which Christ has given them, and they destroy that good and virtuous influence which they might exert in the Church and upon the world. A Christian arrayed in open hostility against a fellow Christian in a court of law, in a contest before the world, where all the bad passions and vindictive feelings of the human heart are exhibited,—what a spectacle! Who that has any regard for religion, any respect for the Christian character, does not feel pained and mortified by such a spectacle? Who that loves the Church and the honor of Christ does not mourn over it? And should not every Christian avoid placing himself in such a situation? Should he not feel that he ought rather to cut off his right hand than furnish such a spectacle before the world? And is it not the duty of all Christians, who feel for the honor of Christ and the credit of the Church, to discountenance an evil which has done so much injury and destroyed so many victims among the professed disciples

of Christ? The following incident, which appeared not long since in the secular papers, affords a striking illustration of our subject: "A complaint was made before a magistrate, by a prominent church member, of an assault by one of the brethren of the same church, and a warrant was issued. The parties were brought up for trial, but instead of proceeding with the case, the magistrate addressed them as follows: 'Gentlemen, you are members of the same church, professors of a faith which teaches peace and good-will to all men. You, as professors of religion, are looked upon as guides to youth, in fact to all, no matter what may be your persuasion. By your example and course of conduct, as well as the doctrines which your faith inculcates, the public takes its moral tone. Now, how does it look to see two men, bound before their God to live in peace, and belonging to an institution in which all should love each other as brethren, standing in court, the *one* an accuser, the *other* a culprit? How will it sound abroad? What will be thought of you out of doors?'" These remarks had the desired effect. The parties shook hands, paid the costs, and went home together. In the course of the day the magistrate received a large and elegant Bible, at the hands of the plaintiff and defendant, which teaches that we should forgive men their trespasses, as we hope our heavenly Father to forgive us our trespasses. This example should teach a lesson to such professing Christians as forget themselves and their religion, when they go to law with their brethren before the civil magistrate.

Let then every Christian, and especially every minister of the gospel, who regards the peace and prosperity of the church and the salvation of his flock, bear his decided testimony against the unchristian practice of professing Christians going to law with each other. Let him warn his people against it, and show them the great evil of this sin, that they may avoid and discountenance it. Let all who love religion, and wish to see it prosper, unite in putting out of the way this rock of offense, which weighs so heavily on the Church, cripples her energies, and prevents her from assuming that high position before the world which she ought to hold.

2. *It is an evil which can in no sense be justified.* When men are guilty of this fault, they are exceedingly prone to justify themselves. They set up many excuses. They sometimes say that the law of the land gives them this right, and therefore it cannot be wrong for them to exercise it. It is true, a Christian has a legal right to go to law with his brother. So also a man has a legal right to manufacture poison and sell it to his neighbor, and take away his property by ministering to his vicious appetite, and sending him and his family to the poor-house; but would it be right? Is it right to make drunkards, and destroy their bodies

and souls, because the *law* gives us the right? When people speak of *their* rights, they should not forget the rights of *others*. If you have a right to go to law with your brother, Christ has *his* right also, and that is, the right of commanding you to love your brother and not injure him, and forgive him when he has trespassed against you; and if you disregard this right of Christ, he will hold you responsible. The Church has her right; and that is, that you should remain faithful to the covenant into which you have entered with her, and not turn against her and sting her like a viper after she has taken you to her bosom. Your brethren have their rights. They stand connected with you by sacred ties. They are deeply concerned in your conduct. You cannot exercise the right which the law gives you to grieve and distress them, without violating their rights, the rights of religion, the rights of God; and God will not permit you to violate these rights with impunity. To exercise such a right is to sin, and like every other sin which God has condemned, it cannot be justified in any case, or under any circumstances.

3. *It is an offense which the Church is bound to make a subject of discipline.* We have shown that it is a violation of principles of religion, which must be regarded as essential in every church. It is a violation of the principle of love, which is indispensable as a bond of union among Christians. It severs this bond, it breaks up the fellowship of the church, and destroys that unity of the Spirit by which the members of Christ's body are to be strengthened, and edified, and comforted, and prepared for the communion of the saints in heaven. And it is the duty of the church to guard against these evils, by exercising the authority with which God has invested her for these purposes. This authority, it is true, should be exercised with prudence and great forbearance; but yet cases do occur in which it must be exercised with promptness and decision, to save the credit of the Church and the honor and interests of religion. "Mark them which cause divisions, and avoid them. We command you, brethren, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly." This is the law of God for the discipline of the church; and in every church that would exercise proper discipline, this law must be enforced. When brother goeth to law with brother, and thus causes division and brings disunion and strife into the church, he must be regarded as walking disorderly, and be held subject to discipline; and if he refuses to yield to the counsel and admonitions of his brethren, the church is bound to withdraw herself from that disorderly member, lest she make herself a partaker of his sin, and share in the dishonor he has brought on religion.

This is a solemn duty which the church owes to herself and

the interests of religion. No church can expect to prosper while she retains in her bosom disorderly and refractory members, who are exercising an influence to injure her character and destroy her usefulness. God will not smile on a people who suffer religion to be thus openly dishonored. He will not bless them as long as they are conniving at wickedness, or tolerating it, or giving it their sanction in any sense. Christians must never think of entering into a compromise with those who set themselves up against the laws and institutions of religion. They must separate themselves from all iniquity, and come up to the high and holy standard which the Church must assume if she would act worthy of herself and maintain the honor of her profession.

Let the Church do her duty, that this evil, which has been so long a reproach to the Christian profession, may be wiped away; that it may no longer be said of the professed followers of Christ, "Brother goeth to law with brother;" that all strife, and malice, and evil speaking among professing Christians may cease, and the Church, which has been so long dishonored and cast down by these blots upon her character, may arise and come forth like the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners.

## SERMON DLIII.

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## THE MINISTRY OF THE GOSPEL.

"For we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: to the one we are the savor of death unto death; and to the other the savor of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things?"—2 Cor. 2: 15, 16.

It is related of an old Puritan divine, to whom it pleased God to grant abundant success in his holy vocation, that on the day of his ordination he made this record of the transaction: "I did this day receive as much honor and work as ever I shall be able to know what to do with." Greater honor no man need, no man can, desire than is connected with the faithful discharge of the work of the ministry. Nor can a human being engage in any work more fitted to task the energies of his whole man, and fill up his whole probation. It affords as much honor and work as ever he shall be "able to know what to do with."

Of the truth of these statements, the Apostle to the Gentiles appears to have had a most vivid and abiding sense. It was honor enough to him, whatever men might think of it, or whatever trials might come upon him in consequence, to be put in trust with the gospel as a minister of the Lord Jesus Christ. A greater honor he neither sought nor desired. He knew no greater. He could conceive of none so great. *The work*, too, he loved no less than the honor. It was all his desire to fulfil it to the glory of his Lord. He engaged in it *because* he loved it. And the more he labored, the more he loved to labor, and the more God honored him. His work was one continued scene of glorious triumphs—not of human prowess, but of grace divine; not of the servant, but of his Master. Wherever he went,—and he went no where but to make known the glorious gospel of the Son of God,—his Lord went with him, smiled upon his exertions, and crowned them with his blessings, so that he could mark his journeyings by the lights which he had kindled in his progress, burning on, and burning ever, from living altars, and sending forth a sweet perfume, not less fragrant than the clouds of incense that ascended from the great altar of the sanctuary on Mount Zion. It was this that gladdened him in his toils,—this evidence of the Divine approbation of his work, so many testimonials of which had been given him,—and that prompted his bursting heart

to pour forth its gratitude in this glowing language, verse 14: "Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savor of his knowledge by us in every place."

If Paul had not himself witnessed, he was yet not unacquainted with, the pomp and the splendor of the triumphal processions accorded to the returning conqueror, on his entrance into the imperial city. It was customary on such occasions to scatter in the path of the victorious general the most fragrant flowers, covering the street as with a bed of roses. The fires of numerous altars that lined the way were fed with frankincense, and sweet-smelling herbs, that sent forth clouds of the most grateful odor. Following in the train of the conqueror was a numerous band, bearing sweet perfumes, the savor of which was diffused through all the surrounding air. Such was the triumph from which the apostle borrows the beautiful imagery of the text—verses 14–16. His language is peculiar. The word expressive of triumph is the very same that Plutarch and others use in reference to the military triumph of victorious generals.

Among the Gentiles, the smoking incense of the altar was thought to be peculiarly agreeable to the gods whom they worshipped, and the sacrifice was called *εὐωδία*, a good savor. These views appear to have been derived from the usages and opinions of the Hebrews. As early as the days of Noah, it is said of an offering made unto God by the grateful patriarch, "And the Lord smelled a sweet savor." The burnt sacrifice under the law is often spoken of as "a sweet savor unto the Lord." Lev. 1: 3. "And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Command the children of Israel, and say unto them, My offering, and my bread for my sacrifices made by fire, for a sweet savor unto me, shall ye observe to offer unto me in their due season: . . . a continual burnt-offering, which was ordained in Mount Sinai for a sweet savor, a sacrifice made by fire unto the Lord." Num. 28: 1, 2, 6. In conformity with this usage, the apostle speaks, (Eph. 5: 2) of Christ as having "given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savor." So also, (Phil. 2: 18,) he speaks of the token of remembrance sent him from the Philippians, as "an odor of a sweet smell, a sacrifice, acceptable, well-pleasing to God." In the same manner, here in the text, he speaks of himself and of the brethren who labored with him in the ministry, as Christ's *εὐωδία* to God, an offering made by Christ, sending forth a sweet savor, acceptable, well-pleasing to God; or, to drop the figure, he spoke of the ministry as instituted by Christ, with the Father's approbation, to spread the knowledge of the gospel through the world.

The theme suggested by the text, and to which I propose now to call your attention, is—



## THE MINISTRY OF THE GOSPEL—ITS WARRANT—WORK—RESULTS—AND RESPONSIBILITIES.

**I. Its Warrant.** Whence is it? From heaven, or of man? Divine or human? Does the ministry derive its authority from the election and appointment of man, or from the calling and ordination of God? It is of great importance, both to the ministry and to those to whom they minister, rightly to determine this point. If we come to you in our own name alone, or in the name of the Church alone, you may hear us or not, receive us or not, at your pleasure. But if we come to you in the name of the great Head of the Church; if we are appointed of God to the ministry of the gospel; if it is God who sends us to you with His message, then the case is vastly altered; then it is no light thing to make light of God's institution.

If, now, we refer to the epistles of Paul, we find a direct answer to these questions. As far as concerned his own ministry, he claimed for it the most ample Divine warrant. It was not a work into which he had thrust himself uncalled, of his own accord. It was not a work devised by man, to which he had devoted himself in obedience to the will of man, and in which he labored at the pleasure or bidding of any man or body of men whatever. Hear him, speaking to the Galatians, (1: 1,) and calling himself "an apostle, not of men, neither by men, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead." He claims of the Philippians (1: 1,) and of the Colossians (1: 2,) to be regarded as "an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God." He introduces himself to Timothy (2. Tim. 1: 1) in the same manner, on one occasion; and on another, (1 Tim. 1: 1,) as "an apostle of Jesus Christ, by commandment of God our Saviour, and Lord Jesus Christ our hope." In 1 Tim. 1: 12, he affirms that it was Christ who put him into the ministry: "I thank Christ Jesus, our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry." In Gal. 1: 15, he claims to have been set apart to this work by the God who gave him birth: "But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen, immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood."

And what he claimed for himself, he also claimed for his brethren. He refers the work of the ministry to the will or pleasure of God. 1 Cor. 1: 21: "For after that in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God; it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." So (1 Cor. 5: 18) he affirms the divine origin of this institution: "And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation." On

this ground he claims for the ministry the distinguished rank of Christ's ambassadors and coadjutors: "Now then (verse 20) we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us." "We, then, (6 : 1,) as workers together, [as his coadjutors,] beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain." "We, in all things, approving ourselves as the ministers of God."

But this claim he still more clearly and fully sets forth in Eph. 4 : 7-16, where he teaches that when the Lord Jesus Christ had accomplished the work which brought him down from heaven, and had ascended up where he was before, he was pleased to bestow on his followers the gifts and graces of the ministry; constituting "some, apostles, and some, prophets, and some, evangelists, and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." He affirms in this passage, of the ministry, that it is an arrangement devised, appointed, and directed by the Lord of heaven and earth, as the medium through which to communicate to the world the grace of salvation, and to fit the believer for a holy heaven.

The necessity of such an institution is exhibited by the apostle in Rom. 10 : 14-16: "How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things." And still more strikingly by our Saviour himself, Matt. 9 : 36-38 : "But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd, [no pastor.] Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers into his harvest." Great honor is here put upon the pastoral office by the Lord Jesus, who encourages his disciples to seek from God himself, whose province it is to raise them up and fit them for their work, a large increase of such laborers. It was immediately upon this that the Saviour separated the twelve, and sent them forth, and not long afterwards, seventy others, with the glad tidings of the kingdom. Having fulfilled his course, he gave commission to the twelve to "go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." And this he did by virtue of his supreme authority as Lord of heaven and earth. "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, &c. And, lo! I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."

Thus sent forth, the disciples sought every where to raise up

a flock of humble followers of Christ, and from among themselves to appoint over them such pastors as the people chose, by divine direction, to watch over them in the Lord. To the labors of these humble ministers, thus selected by and from among their brethren, and recognized by the apostles, or neighboring ministers and churches, either with or without the laying on of hands, God was pleased to set his seal, owning their ministry, giving them his Spirit, rewarding them with souls for their hire, and thus advancing his kingdom in the hearts of men. Such a seal he has ever put upon the labors of those whom he has counted faithful and enabled, putting them into the ministry.

I need not add that such also was the Divine pleasure, under the old dispensation. A distinct order or tribe of men was, by the direction of Him who spake in Horeb, set apart to the service of God in the Levitical ministry. It was by the ministrations and through the medium of men like themselves, that God was then pleased to convey to his people the blessings of his grace. The same principle of Divine procedure runs also through the new dispensation. They whom God calls are not, indeed, made known by their genealogy or descent from any one individual by ordinary generation, or by any ecclesiastical genealogy or descent from the twelve, of which notion we find no mention in Scripture. It is not at all by the will of man, not at all by human designation, that they are called and appointed. "All things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation." It is the reconciling and regenerating Spirit that first calls them into the kingdom of Christ, and then separates them to the work of the ministry. Without this call—of the reality of which an existent ministry and the Church may judge, but which they cannot give—no forms or rites whatever, however consecrated by usage remote and antique, can make a man a minister. With it, and with the seal of God that accompanies it, no human power can unmake a minister of God.

Such, then, is the ministry as respects its warrant. "No man taketh this honor unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron." The office is divine, and he whom the great Head of the Church has put into it, is sent of God.

"The legate of the skies—his theme divine,  
His office sacred, his credentials clear."

To him are to be applied the words of the Redeemer—the tremendous sanction of the Son of God: "He that heareth you, heareth me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth me; and he that despiseth me, despiseth him that sent me."

I pass to consider,—

II. *The Work of the Ministry.* Why has the great Head of the

Church instituted the ministry? What is the particular work which they are to perform? What peculiar service are they to render? In reply to these questions, I scarcely need say, that theirs is not a secular employment. They are not sent to serve tables. The ministry of the Word is something entirely distinct from this. If tables are to be served—if secular work is to be done—let seven men, or more, or less, be chosen, who may be appointed over this business. The minister of Christ is neither to be a trustee nor a deacon. Much less is he to be made responsible for any of the pecuniary derangements or deficiencies of the ecclesiastical treasury. "It is not reason that we should leave the Word of God and serve tables." This is no part of the burden that is laid upon him. The less he has to do with such matters, the better for him. It ruined a Judas, and has been the ruin of thousands in and out of the Papacy—thousands who might have both saved themselves and those who heard them, had they given themselves "continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the Word."

Nor is the minister of the gospel called and sent merely to administer the ordinances of Christ's Church. These ordinances are not without their use, and are by no means without signification. But their place is subordinate. They are but means to an end. They are not the end itself. That is quite a different thing. The administration of the Lord's Supper is of great use to the Church, and it is important in its place—highly so. But this is not the work which the ministry are called to perform. It is a part, and but a small part of the work. It is important that baptism be administered to believers and their households, and it is a work very properly to be performed by the ministry; but it is not *the* work for which Christ Jesus has enabled them and put them into the ministry. "Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel." Had Paul believed that baptism was a sealing ordinance, a saving act, identical with regeneration, he would, of course, have used very different language in relation to its administration. If he could so easily have regenerated men, he would have baptized all he could, and have given himself to this particular work. But no; he had other and greater work to do, and therefore seldom troubled himself about such matters, leaving it indeed not undone, but to be performed by the spiritual teacher of each particular church, as a matter of form to be duly observed in the admission of members.

The impression seems to be gaining ground in some quarters, that the due and orderly performance of these ordinances and certain antiquated rites and ceremonies is the work of the ministry. Would to God that the impression were made on the minds of Papists and Crypto-papists alone! Are there not others who seem to think that the ministry are but appendages to—

very convenient indeed, and very useful in their place—a sort of necessary furniture for, an elegant church, to go through a regular form on the Sabbath-day, of praying, or reading divine service, of preaching and performing the ceremonies of the church, for the gratification of a purse-proud aristocracy, a pleasure-loving people, and a fashion-following assembly? Is this the work which Christ has given us to do? Is it to preside at a ceremony; to give a sanction by our sanctimony to the gayety, and pomp, and display of a Sabbath assembly? Is it, in any sense, to minister to the entertainment of our fellow-sinners in the sanctuary, whether by splendid praying, or eloquent preaching; by an admirable reading of the service, or by elegance of administration? Or are there those who make themselves content with such a work? Alas! that one such can be found.

“ He mocks his Maker, prostitutes and shames  
His noble office, and, instead of truth,  
Displaying his own greatness, starves his flock.”

The work of the ministry is something vastly different from all this. It is coincident with the work which Christ himself came into this world to do. Not indeed to make an atonement for sin, not indeed to regenerate the souls of their fellow-men, neither of which is in their power. But it is to carry forward that great design for the execution and completion of which he promised and gave his Spirit; for the fulfilment of which he sent forth, and continues still to send forth, his chosen messengers with the Word of life. We are sent, my brethren, to be apostles, not of Temperance, nor of Emancipation, but of Christ; to seek and to save that which was lost. We are sent to arouse the sinner from his slumbers, to sound an alarm in the ear of the careless, to trouble them that are at ease in their sins, to convince, to persuade, to entreat, to exhort, to beseech the sinner to be reconciled to God. We are sent to win souls; to rescue, if possible, the perishing and the dying; to pluck them as brands from the burning; to set before them the cross of Christ as the only hope, and to give them no rest until they are brought cheerfully to receive this only Redeemer as their prophet, priest, and king. We are sent not only to bring you out of darkness, but to introduce you into the marvellous light of the gospel; to lead you to the green pastures and the quiet streams of grace. We are to strive not only for the salvation of the sinner, but for the sanctification of the saints; “for the perfecting of the saints; for the edifying of the body of Christ,” “whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.”

In short, the great work of the ministry is so to preach the gospel of Christ that the souls of their fellow-sinners, as many of them, and as speedily as possible, may be truly converted and



brought into the liberty of the children of God. So did the early ministers of the gospel believe and act. They saw the world lying in wickedness, under the wrath and curse of God, and hastening to the judgment; and they earnestly sought to save them. For this they labored. For this they endured reproach. For this they frowned upon the flattery of the world. For this they denied themselves, took up the cross, and suffered without the camp. For this they counted not their lives dear to them; gladly laid them down. This was their great burden. This it was that made them such weeping prophets; that made a Paul protest that he had great heaviness and continual sorrow in his heart, that he could wish that himself were accursed from Christ, for his brethren, his kinsmen according to the flesh. This it was that made them so often cry with the son of Hilkiah, "Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people."

Such, brethren, is our work—the work which is given us to do. This is the work that is to engross our thoughts, to task our energies, to lay our whole man under contribution. Unless we are doing this work, we are doing nothing. We may be ever so popular, preach ever so eloquently, please and gratify the people of our charge ever so much, but it is all laborious trifling if we are not doing the work which is given us to do. "Hard studies, much knowledge, and excellent preaching," says Baxter, "is but more glorious hypocritical sinning, if the end be not right." We must not be content—how can we be?—unless by God's help we are winning souls to Christ. We must cry unceasingly in the ears of these perishing thousands, "Turn ye; for why will ye die?" "I would think it a greater happiness," said Matthew Henry, "to gain one soul to Christ, than mountains of silver and gold to myself. If I do not gain souls, I shall enjoy all my other gains with very little satisfaction; and I would rather beg my bread from door to door than undertake this great work."

In like manner we hear the missionary Brainerd exclaiming: "I care not where or how I live, or what hardships I go through, so that I may but gain souls to Christ. While I sleep I dream of these things; and when I wake, the first thing I think of is this great work." God forbid that any of us who are called to labor in this vocation should be content with any thing else than souls—very many souls—for our hire; that we should content ourselves in any thing short of the salvation and sanctification of those that hear us.

Let us now for a few moments look at—

III. *The Results of the Ministry.* The gospel of Christ can never be faithfully preached in vain. "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal," it is true, not such as the world are



wont to use in their sanguinary conflicts, and therefore the world may despise them. But feeble as they seem, they are "mighty, through God to the pulling down of strong holds." "The word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." "Is not my word like as a fire, saith the Lord, and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?" "For as the rain cometh down, and the snow, from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it."

God's Word is never preached in vain. The faithful minister of Christ never labors in vain. The preaching of such a minister ever savors of Christ. His very person spreads the savor wherever he goes.

"Tis e'en as if an angel shook his wings:  
Immortal fragrance fills the circuit wide,  
That tells us whence his treasures are supplied.  
So when a ship, well freighted in the stores  
The sun matures on India's spicy shores,  
Has dropped her anchor, and her canvas furled  
In some safe haven of our western world,  
'T were vain inquiring to what port she went;  
The gale informs us, laden with the scent."

So has it ever been. By the foolishness of preaching it has pleased God to save them that believe. Unnumbered millions have thus been saved. Christ's ministers have reaped a rich reward. They have preached "not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power; not as pleasing man, but God." The word thus preached has triumphed over all opposition, and proved itself, in instances numberless, to be "the power of God and the wisdom of God unto salvation." It is adapted to the sinner's state. It is fitted to awaken, to arouse, to convince, to alarm, to instruct, to enlighten, to sanctify, to save. Its efficacy is life-giving. It is a *savor of life*. Its voice is that of hope and salvation. It points to heaven, it leads the soul to God. It is a savor of life *unto life*. Myriads on myriads in the full fruition of paradise can testify to its life-imparting virtue, and not a few who still linger on the shores of time, not a few who worship with us in the sanctuary. And as it is with the word itself, so is it with them that preach it. They are a savor of life. Their work, their ministry, their preaching, their labors, are unto life. They have been angels of mercy to untold millions. A great company, whom no man can number, will bless God for ever that they were permitted to enjoy the

labors of a godly ministry. The ministry to them was as life from the dead. What a dark world it would have been, but for their light! What a wretched world, but for their hope of which they have spoken! What an abandoned world, but for the ministrations of piety and love! What would you have been, dear hearers, but for the ministry? To what, under God, do you owe your own selves, your comforts, your consolations, your hopes of heaven, your blessed foretastes of the joys above, but to the ministry so despised of men, so honored of God?

*"In them that are saved, and in them that perish."* It is too true—we cannot but admit it—there are those that **perish** even in an atmosphere so salubrious, so adapted to life. That which was ordained unto life becomes to some an occasion of death. To some who hear us, "we are the savor of death unto death." "We bear, indeed," says one of the early fathers, "the sweet odor of Christ's gospel to all; but all who participate in it do not experience its salutiferous effects. Thus to diseased eyes even the light of heaven is noxious; yet the sun does not bring the injury. And to those in a fever honey is bitter; yet it is sweet nevertheless. Vultures, too, it is said, fly from sweet odors of myrrh; yet myrrh is myrrh, though the vultures avoid it. Thus if some be saved, though others perish, the gospel retains its own virtue, and we, the preachers of it, remain just as we are. The gospel retains its odorous and salutiferous properties, though some may disbelieve, abuse it, and perish."

The language of the apostle in reference to these results of the ministry is taken, apparently, from the writings of the Rabbins. We often meet with similar expressions in the writings of the ancient Jewish doctors. Thus they say of the words of the law, "They are a savor of life to Israel, but a savor of death to the people of the world." Again, "Whoever pays attention to the law on account of the law itself, to him it becomes an aroma (a savor) of life; but to him who pays no attention to the law on account of the law itself, to him it becomes an aroma of death."

It is thus with medicine; to the one it proves a savor of life, and to the other of death. The minister of the gospel "is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel;" while to those who receive his message and his Master he proves an unspeakable blessing, to those who reject both he becomes an occasion of increased condemnation. Solemn and awful is the relation of a pastor to his people. It affects the spiritual condition of every member of the flock. For weal or for woe, will every one of them remember him through all eternity. To all eternity you will rejoice that ever you listened to our entreaties, that you ever heard our voice; or to all eternity you will curse the hour that brought you under our ministrations. You must be either the better or the worse for our ministry. If you give heed, it will

save you; if you forbear, it will ruin you. Every sermon that we preach is big with the fate, the fortune of souls. If it is true that God hath sent us, you cannot be an unconcerned, an unaffected hearer of our message. Deeply does it concern every one of you so to hear that you may be saved. Terrible will your condemnation be, if you heed us not. Aggravated beyond expression will be your guilt, if you "neglect the great salvation" thus presented, thus pressed upon your acceptance. "And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet. Verily I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city."

IV. *The responsibilities of the ministry.* Well might an apostle, though inspired, though not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles, though commissioned and sent by the immediate revelation of Jesus Christ,—well might even a *Paul* exclaim, "*And who is sufficient for these things?*"

We whom God has counted faithful, and enabled us, putting us into the ministry, are but *earthen vessels*—but flesh and blood—are men of like passions with you, subject to all the infirmities of a corrupt nature, exposed to temptations innumerable from the world, the flesh, and the devil.

"Bowed down beneath a load of sin,  
By Satan sorely pressed,  
By wars without and fears within,  
By numerous cares distressed."

Weak, short-sighted, prone to err, liable to mistakes in judgment and errors in practice, needing and seldom receiving the same instruction, encouragement, consolation, reproof, admonition, entreaty and counsel as the humblest of our flocks. Such, dear brethren, are we.

And yet what a burden are we called to bear; what a load of anxiety; what an amount of responsibility! "I have set thee," saith the great Jehovah, "a watchman unto the house of Israel. If thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me, when I say unto the wicked, O wicked man! thou shalt surely die! if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, the wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at thine hand." These are the words that ring in our ears when we come before you in the sanctuary; that follow us to our homes, to our studies, to our retirements. Which of you all would wish to bear such a burden?

How overwhelming to the conscientious minister is the reflection that forces itself upon him, as he looks about on his congregation: "On the words that I am about to speak, and the manner in which I speak them, are depending the eternal destinies of many of these perishing souls!" And oh! how much wisdom does it

need to direct the inquiring soul! One wrong word may prove the ruin of a soul. What wisdom do we need in order to make the crooked straight and the rough places plain; to seek the wandering and set them right; to instruct the wayward, to persuade the obstinate, to rebuke the transgressor, to comfort the disconsolate, to strengthen the feeble, and to present every man at last perfect before God!

But I forbear. I have said enough to show that the minister of Christ can not be too thoroughly furnished with the stores of learning, both human and divine; that he of all men should be a novice neither in Christian experience nor in theological discipline; that he needs a sound mind in a sound body; that he cannot be too watchful, too meek, too diligent, too laborious, if he task himself to the utmost of his strength. I have said enough to convince the most inconsiderate that the ministry have large claims upon the people of God, for support in their work, for a comfortable subsistence, for a ready and cheerful co-operation, and for a constant remembrance in their prayers. Let your prayers go forth from hearts sincere and sympathizing for him who is called to watch over you in the Lord. What can he accomplish else? "It is not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord." "Neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase. For we are laborers together with God." Of what avail will all our preaching, all our labors be, without the Spirit? What a blessing, rich and eternal, to you and yours, will the ministry be, if the Spirit be given! To how many of you will it then prove a savor of life unto life, to whom, without the Spirit, it must prove a savor of death unto death! Pray, then, we beseech you, brethren, in all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, that we, who are called to this work, and who are not "sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves," may receive all needful sufficiency of God; may be enriched by him in all utterance, and in all knowledge; may be made wise to win souls, and may save both ourselves and them that hear us; that when we are called to give an account for your souls, we "may do it with joy and not with grief."